

Report from the Executive Officer

At the 2008 meeting of the Board of Directors, I was asked to negotiate a contract with the University of Tennessee, Department of Sociology to retain the support of the Administrative Office for at least three years. In September 2008, a three-year contract was proposed to the Department of Sociology, the College of Arts and Sciences, The University of Tennessee and the Board of the Society for the Study of Social Problems. By the first of October 2008, all of the relevant parties approved that contract to cover the calendar years 2009, 2010, and 2011, with an annual review of the contract's budget as appropriate. The contract was signed in time for the committee appointed by the Board to do campus visits and interview the two candidates for the Executive Officer position. The decision to write a separate contract for the Administrative Office reflects recognition on the part of the Society of the importance of the Administrative Officer position.

The Administrative Officer position is the one full-time employee of the Society. Michele Smith Koontz has shown herself to be a very intelligent, hard-working person who has in her years with the Society learned the traditions and organization of SSSP. I believe that much of the work that I have accomplished as Executive Officer has happened because Michele has been working with me. As the Society moves forward, the Board and the new Executive Officer may wish to reflect on the centrality of this position to the success of the organization and consider whether or not recognition of this in the Bylaws is appropriate.

Hector Delgado has been selected as the incoming Executive Officer. He will be a fine Executive Officer. The selection process outlined in the Operations Manual worked reasonably well. Since his selection, Hector and I have corresponded and the day before the 2009 Budget, Finance and Audit Committee spring meeting discussed formal and informal aspects of the role of Executive Officer. He met with some of the relevant officials at the University of Tennessee as well. Since the Executive Officer provides a means for reflecting the views of an active social science scholar-activist to the larger professional community and to the other employees of the Society, I hope that each member of the Board will be supportive of Hector as he moves into this position. Your support for me has been essential to my performance as your Executive Officer. I shall always be grateful. I have told Hector that he is free to call on me. I believe that Hector will bring important new energy and ideas to the position. I look forward to supporting him as he helps the Society to achieve new areas of excellence, advocacy and international presence.

Working with Sarah Hendricks and Sharon Shumaker has continued to be an absolutely delightful experience. Not only do these two very intelligent and efficient persons provide great service to the Society, they have a wonderful sense of humor and commitment to the kind of values that underpin most of SSSP's initiatives. My weekly staff meetings are a highpoint. With the electronic communication possibilities and the constant improvement in electronic communication, I expect that the Society and its members should improve over the next several years. While we continue to make progress in this area, I see more in the immediate future. If you visit the web site, you will find that nineteen of the twenty-two Special Problems Divisions have updated their mission statements. Conflict, Social Action and Change, Mental Health and Sociology and Social Welfare have not updated their statements since the booklet was published during the Presidency of Pam Roby.

Special Problems Divisions are easy to form and play an important role in the generation of the Annual Meeting Program and in changing the directions of scholarship in our Society. The Council of Special Problems Division function in the nominating process is an important organization innovation that definitely militates against Michels' "iron law of oligarchy." Many times over my tenure as Executive Officer, I have been surprised at the names that have surfaced on the lists of potential candidates prepared by the Council of Special Problems Division Chairs. People who are relatively recent members of the organization compose the majority of this Council. Each Special Problems Division represents an area of research and advocacy within SSSP. The youth and diversity makes for some entries on the list of nominees. The list includes but is not limited to the "well-seasoned" members of SSSP. This year we are proposing that the Council of Special Problems Division Chairpersons take a more proactive stance in dealing with divisions, which appear to have become inactive. The proposed bylaws amendment will appear in the report of the bylaws committee.

Like many other groups with a substantial portion of reserves invested, the Society experienced a large drop in the market value of our investments. In May our investment advisor, Susan M. Carlson, reported a drop of 24.2% over the preceding 12 months. Our reserves, which are invested in ways described in the report of the Treasurer, would fund over two thirds of the amount that we spent in 2008. Assuming a stable membership and journal subscription base, the Society can expect to continue current programs under the watchful eye of Michele and the Budget, Finance and Audit Committee.

Our membership as of June 30, 2009 was 1546 paid members. On June 30, 2008 we had 1594 paid members. Of the 2009 total, 571 were student members and 132 were first time professional members. These new members need to be encouraged to remain members and active in our organization. We have a reputation as an organization that supports new scholars and new scholarship. At least 188 of these new members will be attending the meeting in San Francisco. When you see a new member ribbon be sure to welcome them to this fine organization. Perhaps the President might send an email to all of the new members welcoming them. A well-crafted letter with the President's electronic signature could be sent automatically to each new member of SSSP. Divisions could be alerted to new members as well. I believe that we must become more intentional about welcoming scholars into our community if we want to grow. During the next several years, many non-profits will be competing for the membership dollar of supporters. Be sure you know why you are a member of SSSP and be sure to promote SSSP to your colleagues, your students and your professional friends. This is a great organization and a really cool community.

Where Are We Going?

Do the officers and members of SSSP have a vision for the future? Certainly some do and some work has been done on implementing suggestions from the planning retreat.

What has not yet been done is to create a vision that is widespread among the members. Many problems facing the societies of the world today are global in nature and raise questions like how large a population of human beings can the planet sustain? While some of the advanced societies waste food, other societies cannot feed their children. Malnutrition is a major cause of death in

some sections of the African continent. Global warming will take joint action by the people of many nations, if we are to reverse the trend. Why shouldn't SSSP actively sponsor efforts to organize sister societies in countries like India and China? We have an organizational model. Couldn't we help scholars interested in research on social problems to get in touch with each other at least within their own countries and then perhaps via the internet with us. One of my Ph.D. students is now employed at a University in Singapore. Some of you have international contacts; let us begin to see how SSSP can help to parent professional societies with similar goals elsewhere in the world.

It Does Not Seem that Long Ago.

In 1978, Gary Marx called me to see if I would serve on the program committee. I told him that I wasn't a member. He said I could join. I am not going to recount my history in this organization. I just want to say thank you to all of the truly fine scholars and activists committed to making the world we live in a more just place. I plan to continue to participate in the future as time, health and financial resources permit. I became a sustaining member several years ago. I hope you'll join me in sustaining SSSP scholarship in pursuit of a just society.

Tom Hood
Executive Officer
September 1990 to August 2009